

## THE SAVAGE GARDEN: TEMPORARY, PUBLIC DISPLAYS

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In 2006, my nursery, California Carnivores, was approached by the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park to lend about 70% of the stock for a six-month carnivorous plant display to be held the following year. The Conservatory plans such large events, with themes such as "Orchids of the World" or "Medicinal Plants", a full year before they occur. I attended a meeting where preliminary plans were laid out. While the Conservatory has always had some carnivorous plants on display, such as *Nepenthes*, in their 100-plus year history, they had never before held a long-term but temporary large event.

The staff at the Conservatory was delightful to work with. The primary focus of the display was to be a rather large bog garden, surrounded by smaller displays. Yet I was quite surprised when they told me they were planning to actually build a large raised container, fill it with wet peat moss and sand, and transplant the plants into it. In other words, build a REAL bog garden! This enormous task perplexed them and horrified me!

No, no, no!" I interrupted. "There's an easier way! You FAKE it!"

The staff looked at me with perplexed expressions.

"I call it the Zip-Lock-Bag-Bog" I told them. I had "invented" this method when California Carnivores did our first large public display in 1990 for the California State Fair in Sacramento.

This is what you basically do: Take established, potted plants, put them in appropriately sized zip-lock bags, and water them over-head so the bag acts as the water tray. You then decorate around the potted, bagged plants with various decorative mosses, such as Oregon Green or Sheet Moss, to hide the pots and make it appear as though the plants were actually planted in soil.

This was a joyous revelation to the staff. It saved them time, there was no sloppy-wet leaky messes, no transplant shock, and best of all it saved a hell of a lot of money. Plus any plant that needed to be removed for whatever reason could be done so and replaced in about two minutes. To keep the plants wet, you simply watered each one separately.

Kristen Natoli, the leader of this project, told me it turned a nightmare into an easy, simplistic pleasure. Many Bay Area Carnivorous Plant Society members, including editors of this Newsletter, also helped make the display a rousing success. Tens of thousands of people saw it. The exhibit was called "Chomp!" While usually the Conservatory never repeats a show for at least ten years, they have asked us to do a "Chomp! 2" exhibit for 2010, only three years after the first.

Temporary, public displays of carnivorous plants are a sure-fire way to publicize this wonderful and growing hobby. If you wish to increase membership of your local carnivorous plant (CP) club or society, its a fun way to do it.

I have done such short-term displays in many places, some quite surprising. My local bank, for instance, has a large wall where they usually exhibit art work, from local professional artists and photographers to children's finger painting. Several times I have done CP exhibits there, but not the Zip-Lock-Bag-Bog. Instead I did a simple terrarium with grow-lights display, what I call the "greenhouse-style" terrarium. This is now of course one of the most popular ways hobbyists grow CP, especially tropicals, at home. But of course even temperate plants like venus flytraps can be grown in tanks seasonally. This is where potted plants are in saucers of water in a tank under grow-lights, as photographed in my book *The Savage Garden* on page 42 or in Barry Rice's *Growing Carnivorous Plants* on page 189, where the plants sit on a bed of water-logged sand. You can of course also make such a tank "naturalistic" by using zip-lock bags and mosses, what I call the "landscaped-potted terrarium".

Whenever I did such a display at my bank, there were always people looking at it in amazement, and all my business cards would be gone. I would have small brief signs offering information about the plants as well.

Here are some places you can set up such temporary, public displays: schools, public libraries, various garden clubs (especially when they have their annual "flower shows"), restaurants (a nice change from aquariums), airports, county fairs, children's museums, even hotel lobbies or popular coffee shops. I even once set up a tank in a dentist's office that mesmerized people for months, and not only did the dentist become a carnivorous plant collector but some of his customers too! (As a gift he gave me a large white pot in the shape of

a molar! *Drosera dichotoma* 'Giant' looks great in it!)

Three times I have done displays in the lobby for productions of "Little Shop of Horrors", now the most popular stage show in America, surpassing the old chestnut "Our Town", if you can believe that!

If you want to increase membership for your local society or club, by all means offer to do a display at local garden centers.....and then tell them how to correctly grow the CP they try to sell! Put up a sign or leave cards or flyers advertising your next meeting. Your membership will certainly increase, and you'll be spreading the intoxicating pleasure all of us already feel by growing these weird and wonderful plants!



Sonoma County Fair prehistoric bog.